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CEREBUS

RICK'S STORY

9

228
MAR

E X C E R P T

But the most frequent cause of conversion was the Qu'ran itself. During the pilgrimage to the Ka'aba of 616, when pilgrims came to Mecca from all over Arabia, Abu Jahl posted his colleagues at all the gates of the city to warn them against Muhammad. One pilgrim, a poet called al-Tufayl ibn Amr of the western tribe of Daws, was so alarmed by what he heard that he stuffed his ears with cotton to make sure that he would not hear the Prophet's enchantment. But when he arrived at the Ka'aba and saw Muhammad standing in prayer before the shrine, he suddenly felt ridiculous. 'God bless my soul,' he said, 'here am I, an intelligent man, a poet, knowing perfectly well the difference between good and evil, so what is to prevent me from listening to what this man is saying? If it is good I shall accept it; if it is bad I shall reject it.' He followed Muhammad, who explained the religion to him and then recited some of the Qu'ran. Tufayl was astonished: 'by al-Llah, I have never heard anything finer or more just!' he exclaimed. He went back to his tribe and during the next few years converted about seventy families in his own tribe.

❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄

But, as one might expect, his wives were extremely jealous of the little nobody who was carrying the Prophet's child. Aisha and Hafsah organised a protest and a rebellion in the harem. It is difficult to understand this strange incident, which caused a major crisis and may have involved more than meets the eye. The story as it stands is attributed to Umar, who had militant views about women, believed they should be seen and not heard and felt that the wives of the Emigrants were picking up bad habits from the women of Medina. Muhammad, however, was much softer and more lenient with his women and one day Umar was horrified to hear the most unholy racket issuing from the Prophet's apartments. The wives were insisting that Muhammad give a bigger share to his own family than to the rest of the *umma.* Umar called to Muhammad, asking his permission to come in, and immediately silence fell. When he entered he found the Prophet helpless with laughter: as soon as they had heard Umar's voice, the women had scuttled in terror behind the *hijab.* Umar grimly remarked that it would be better if his wives had a similar respect for the Prophet and yelled to the women who were cowering behind the curtain: 'O enemies of yourselves, are you afraid of me and not the Messenger of God?' 'Absolutely,' one of the wives replied, 'for you are rougher and harsher than God's Messenger.'

Umar had already been worried that his daughter Hafsah was getting out of hand and had told her that she must control her jealousy and accept the fact, for example, that she was not as attractive as Aisha. But Hafsah had become so vociferous about Maryam that at one point Muhammad had wearily promised that he would not see her again, but then found that nothing had improved.

...continued on last page

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RICK'S STORY
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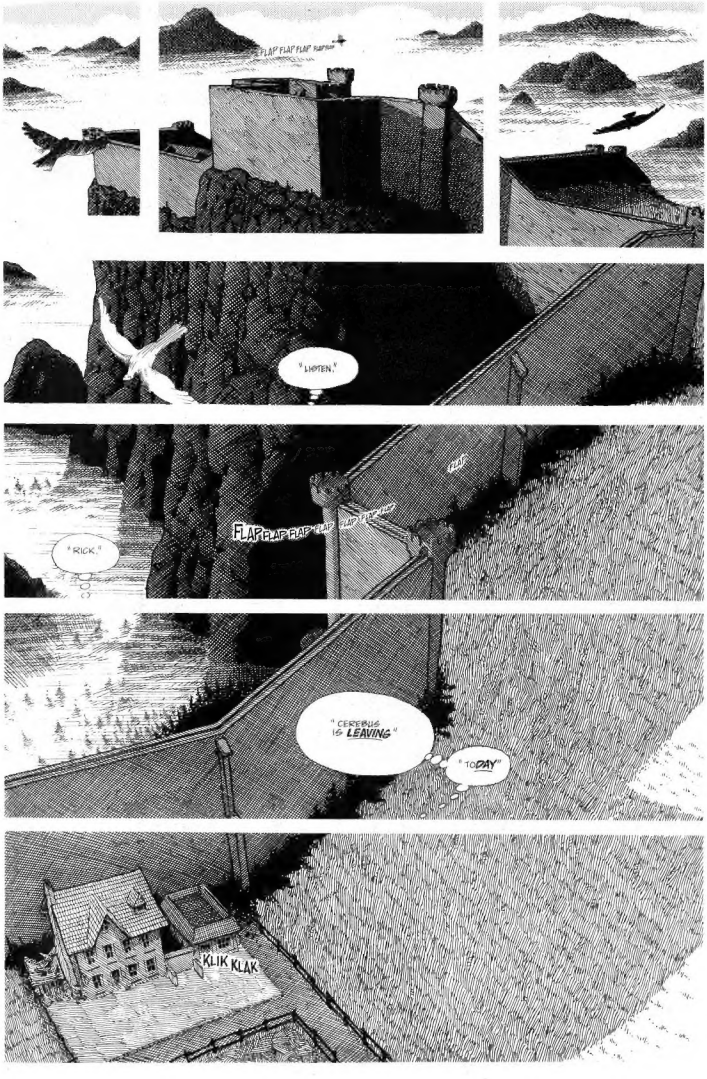
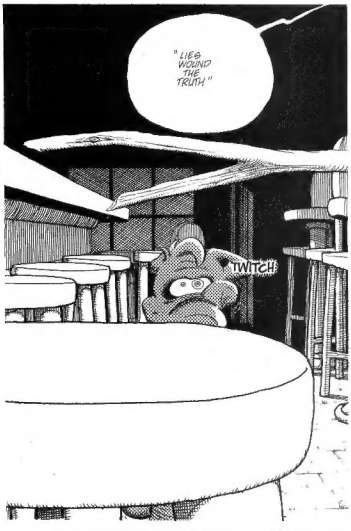
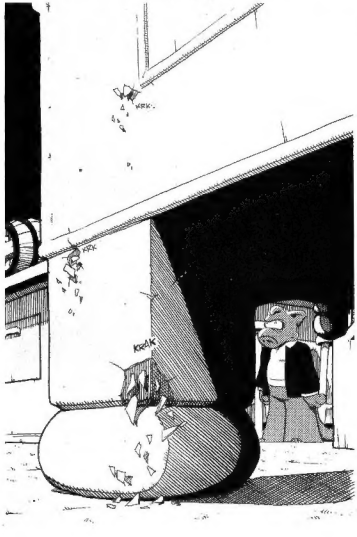

FLAP FLAP FLAP flap flap
"LISTEN."
FLAP FLAP FLAP FLAP FLAP FLAP
"RICK."
"CERTAINLY IS LEAVING"
"TODAY"
KLIK KLAK

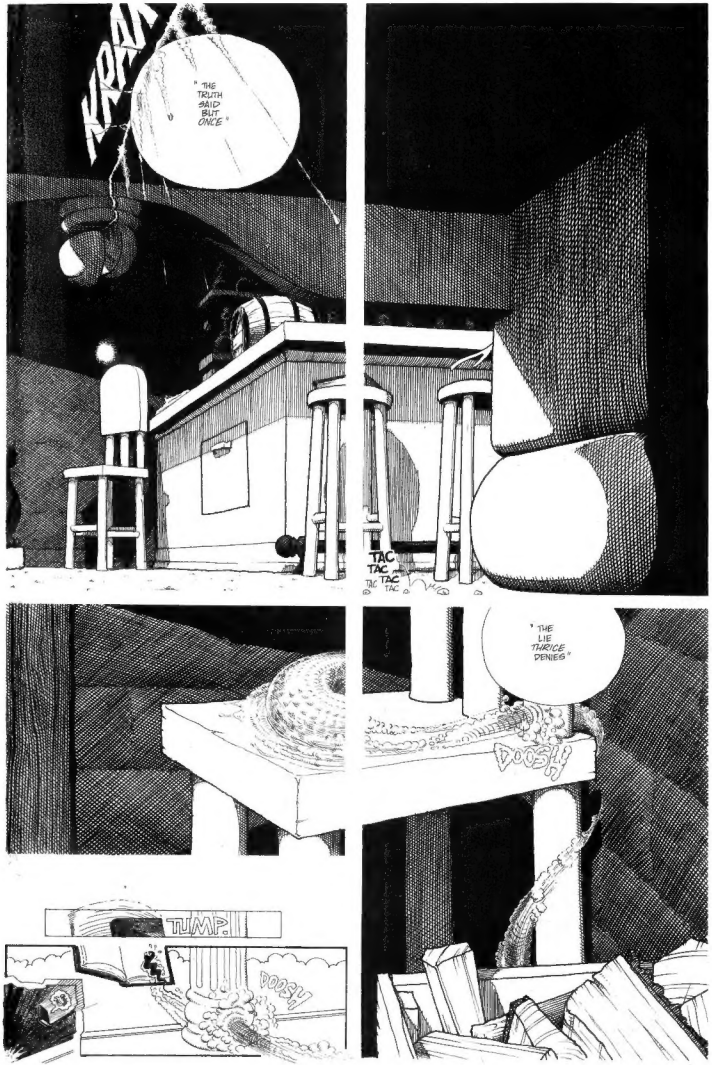
SCRAAPE

SCRAAAAAPE

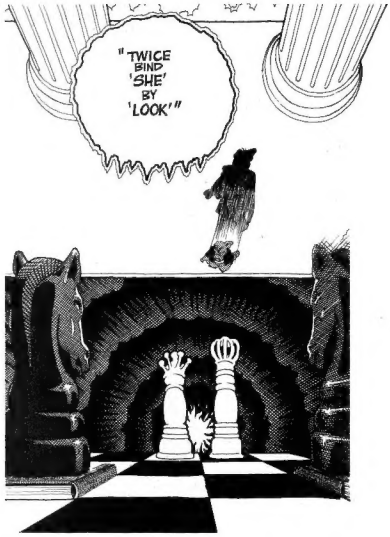

"LIES WOUND THE TRUTH."
TWITCH!!


KRK.
KRK
KRAK

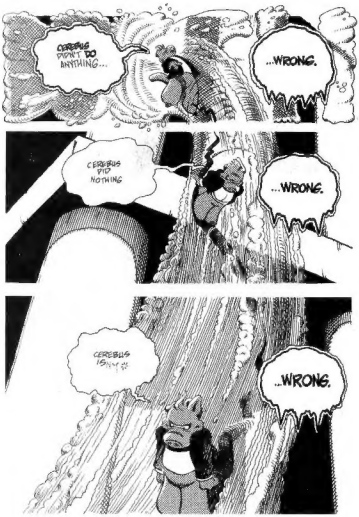
"TRUTH WILL BIND LIES"


KRAK
" THE TRUTH SAID BUT ONCE "
TAC TAC TAC TAC
" THE LIE THRICE DENIES "
DOOSH!
TUMP.
DOOSH

YOU TOLD JOANNE THAT YOU WERE ONCE MARRIED TO JAKA
OHHHH SHIT!
NAY!
RICK.
RICK LISTEN!
"I BIND HE BY 'LISTEN'"
NAY...
WHAT HAPPENED WAS
WHAT CEREBUS TOLD JOANNE WAS
CEREBUS SAID
TO JOANNE WAS
"LOOK.."


"TWICE BIND 'SHE' BY 'LOOK'"

LOOK...
NO


CERBERUS DIDN'T DO ANYTHING...
...WRONG.
CERBERUS DID NOTHING
...WRONG.
CERBERUS DIDN'T!
...WRONG.

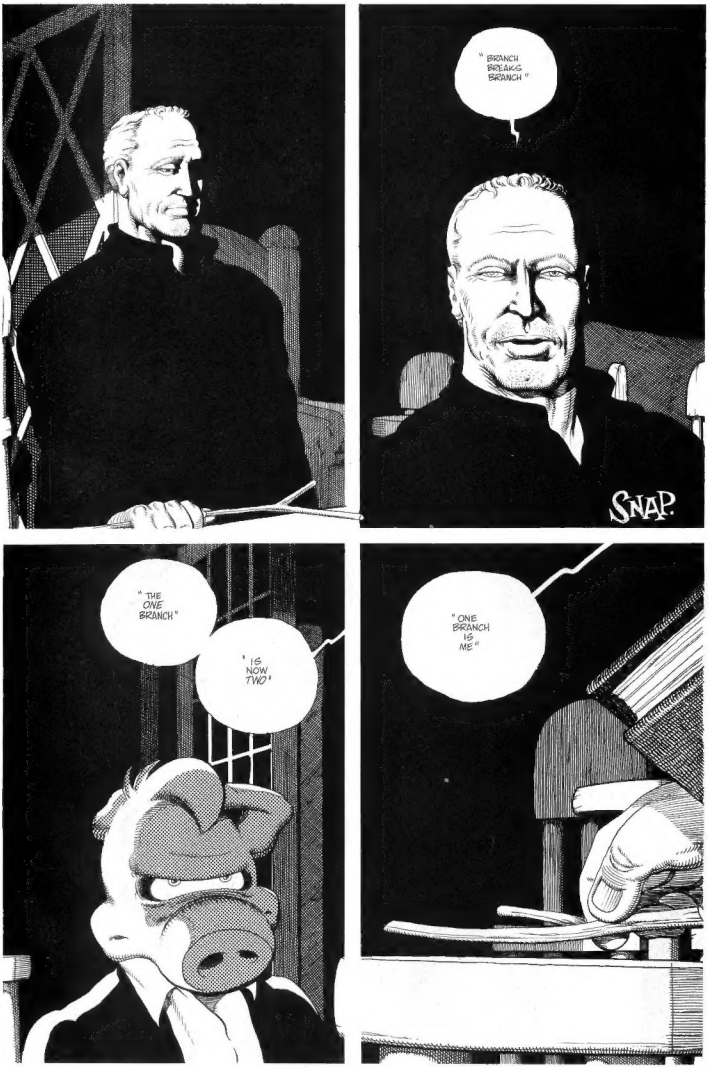
"'IT' THRICE BINDS 'ITS' SELVES"
'ALL'
'ALL' CERBERUS
SAID US
WE'RE 'ALL'

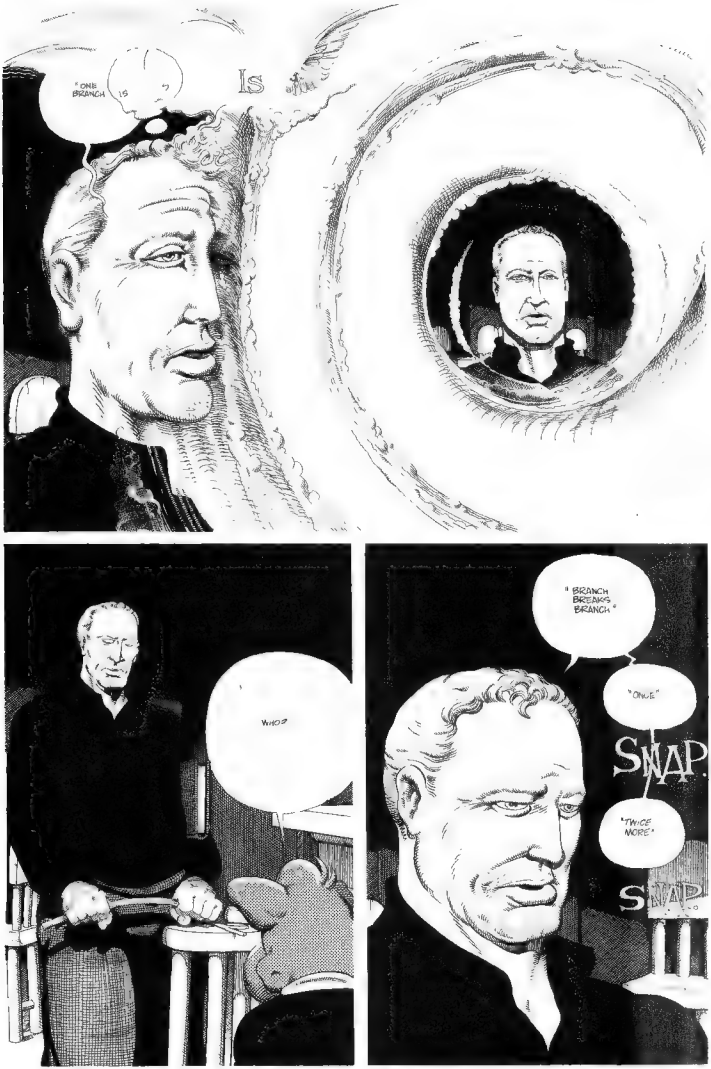
"WITH."
WITH
WITH
WITH

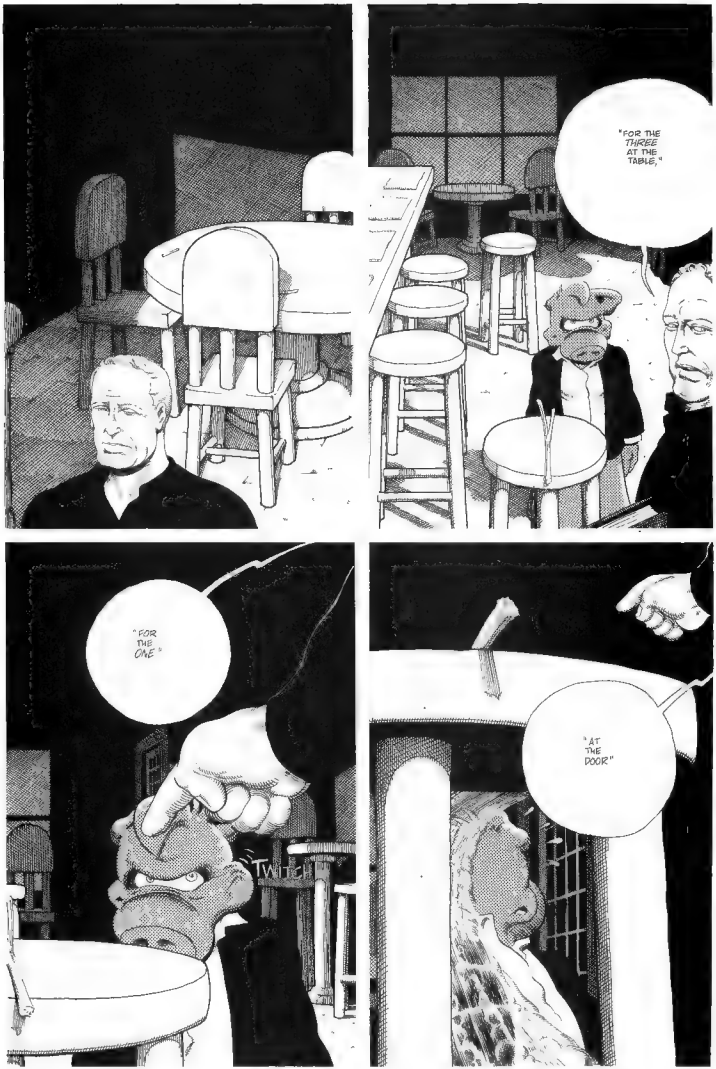
"IN!"
IN
IN
IN

THUMP

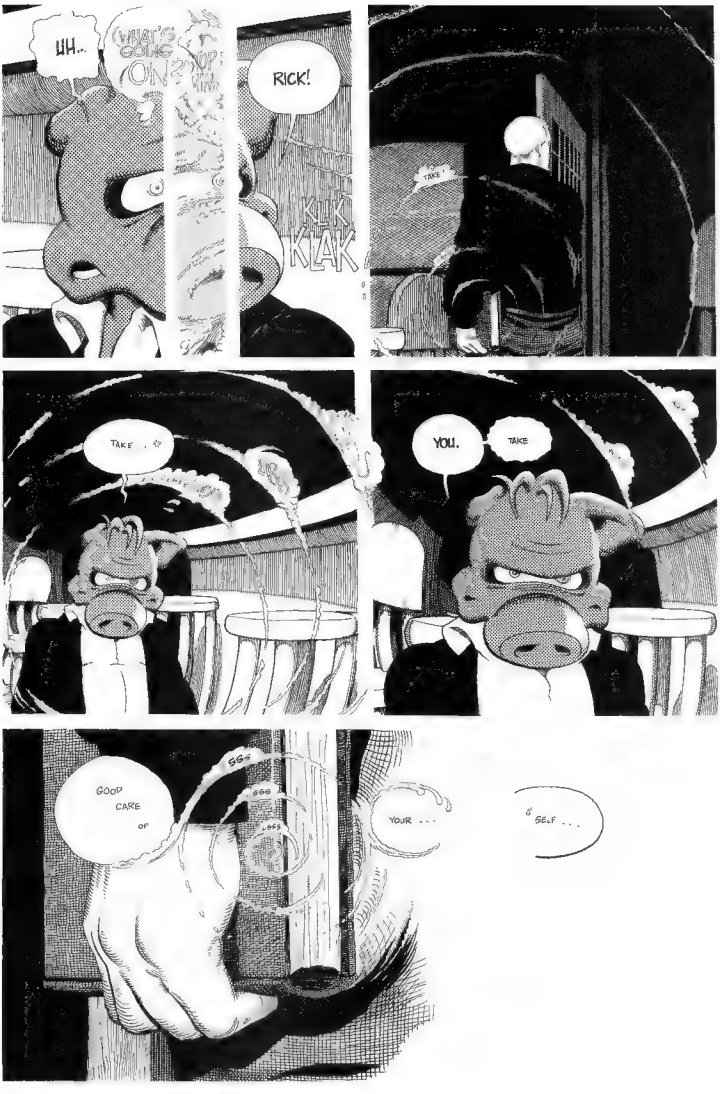
YOUR
BOOK.

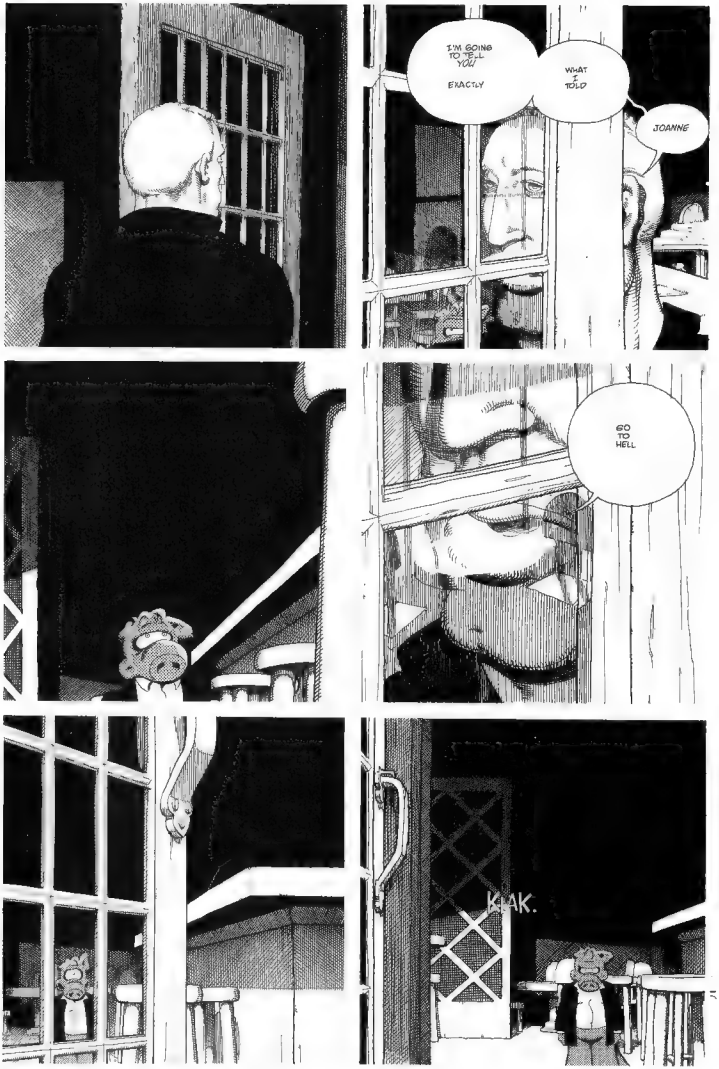

" BRANCH BREAKS BRANCH "
SNAP
" THE ONE BRANCH "
" IS NOW TWO "
" ONE BRANCH IS ME "

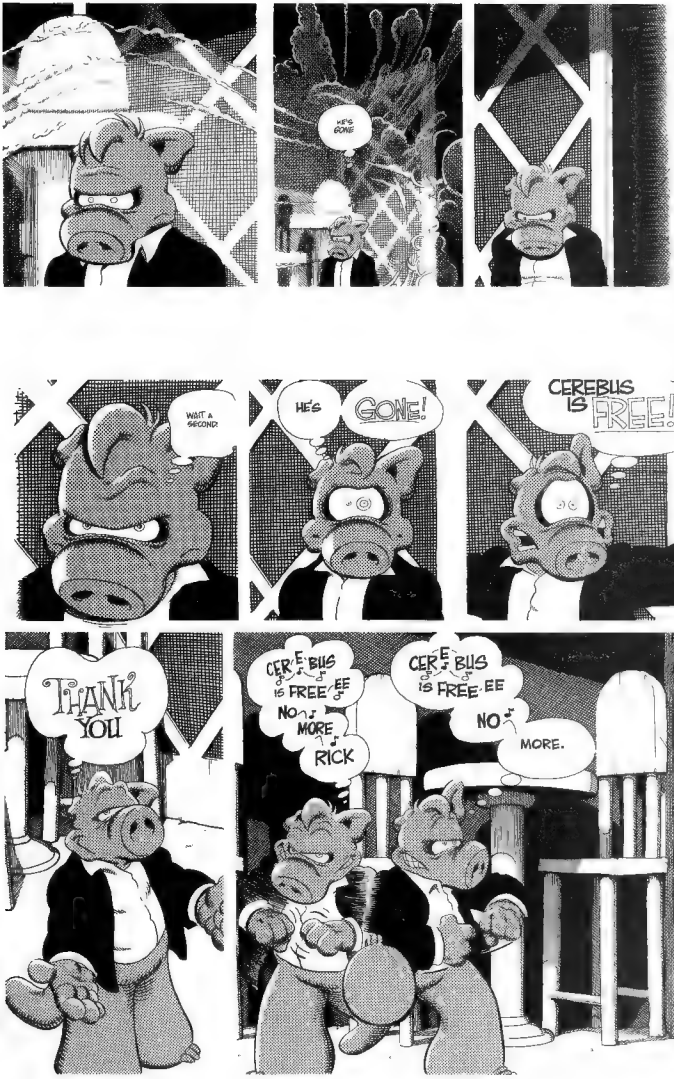

"ONE BRANCH IS
WHO?
"BRANCH BREAKS BRANCH."
"ONCE"
SWAP
"TWICE MORE"
SWAP


"FOR THE THREE AT THE TABLE,"
"FOR THE ONE"
TWITCH
"AT THE DOOR"

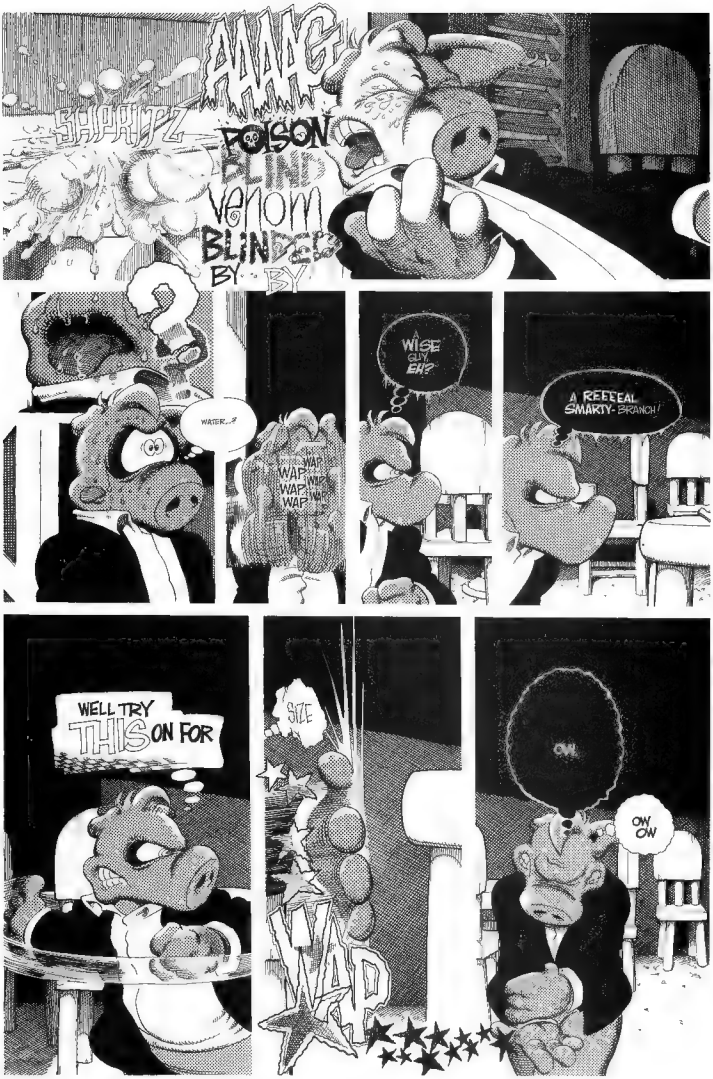
TWITCH
"GOOD.. BYE"
WE'L.. SEE EACH OTHER ONLY ONCE MORE AFTER TODAY
GOOD-BYE
uh..
STOP IT

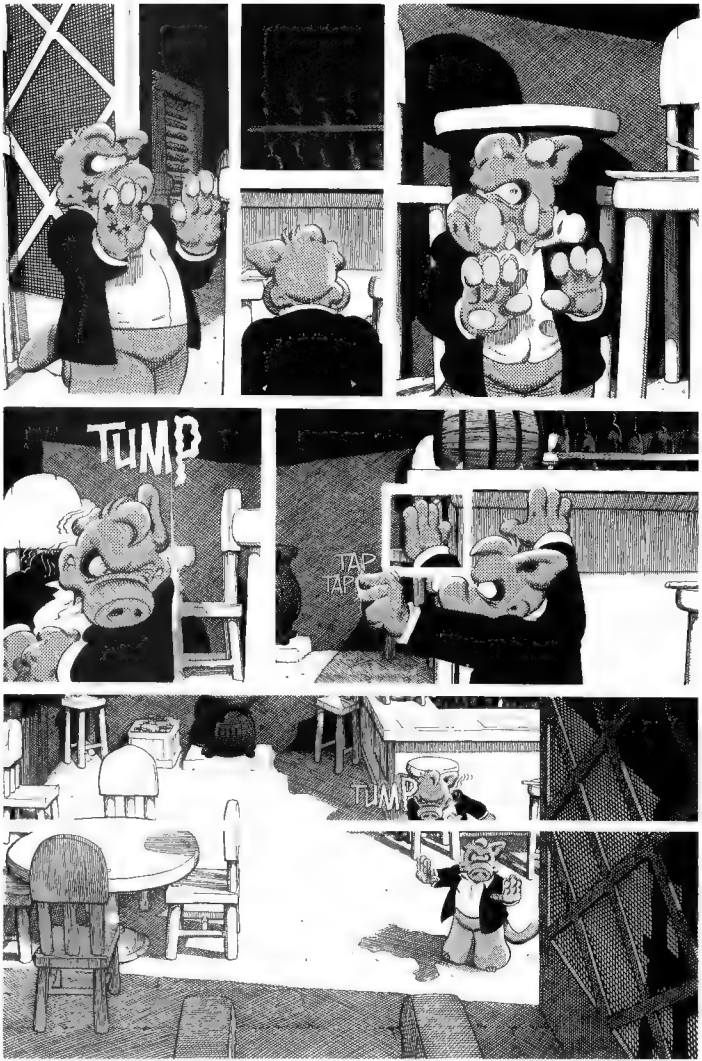

UH..
WHAT'S GOING ON?
RICK!
KLK KLAK
TAKE
TAKE
YOU.
TAKE
GOOD CARE OF
SSS
SSS
SSS
YOUR . . .
SELF . . .

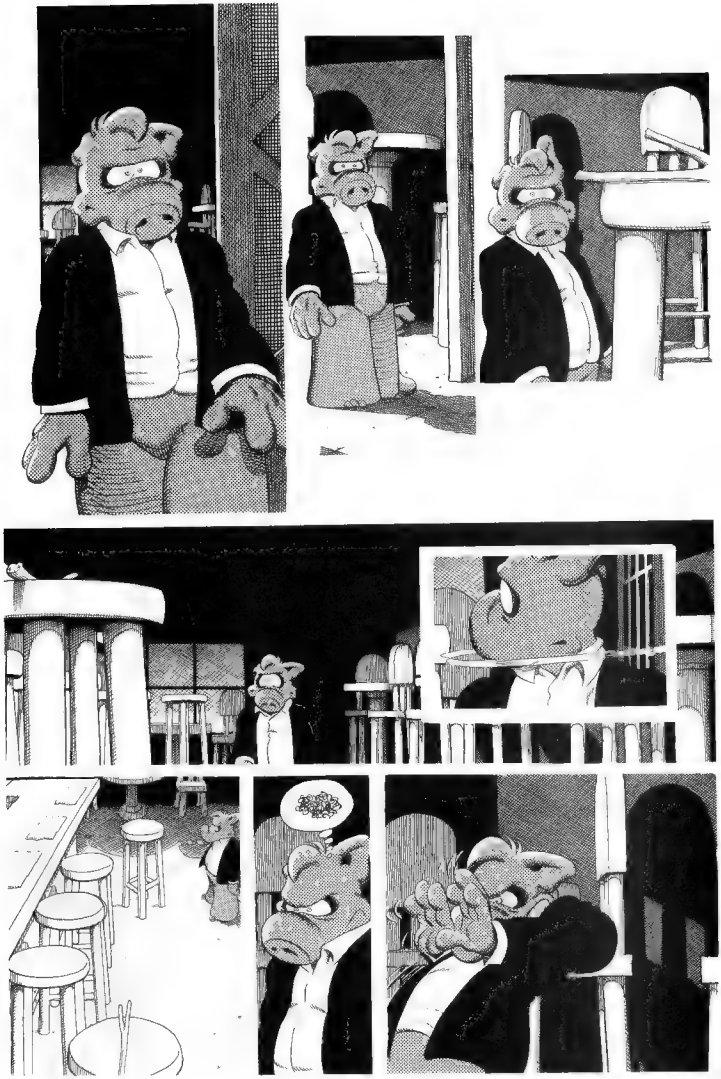

I'M GOING TO TELL YOU EXACTLY
WHAT I TOLD
JOANNE
GO TO HELL
KLAK.


HE'S GONE
WAIT A SECOND
HE'S GONE!
CEREBUS IS FREE!
THANK YOU
CER-E-BUS IS FREE-EE
NO MORE RICK
CER-E-BUS IS FREE-EE
NO MORE.

KICK
THE NERVE OF OLD GIRLY-BOY...
WUHH.
CASTING A CONTAINER SPELL ON CEREBUS... TRYING TO BIND CEREBUS IN HIS TAVERN, I BOOK.
OR MAKE CEREBUS LEAVE. I STAY HERE
WELL CEREBUS WILL SHOW HIM-- CEREBUS WILL STAY HERE... LEAVE
SKRICH SKRICH
CEREBUS DOESN'T GET IT
NO BLOOD NO ANIMAL GUTS
WHAT THE HECK KIND OF LIMP-WRISTED, GIRLY-BOY KIND OF CONTAINER SPELL IS IT SUPPOSED TO BE?


AAAG
SPLATZ
POISON
BLIND
venom
BLINDED
BY
BY
WATER...?
WAP
WAP
WAP
WAP
WAP
WISE GUY EH?
A REEEEAL SMARTY-BRANCH!
WELL TRY THIS ON FOR
SIZE
WAP
OW!
OW OW


TUMP
TAP TAP
TUMP



THUMP
BUMPITY BUMP
THUD!
OH.
KAY.
THAT'S
IT.
CLUNK
CLATTER
CEREBUS.
WAP!
IS
LEAVING.
WAP!
STOMP STOMP STOMP

part three

MAMA'S BOY

Dave,

Re: "Mama's Boy," part one:

As usual, you have a way of pointing out the obvious (once popular opinion can be beaten into submission). Of course that's how "choosing up sides" functions. No wonder it has endured so long, despite the crusade of Dear Abby to have it abolished in gym classes. And yes, I sucked at sports until I was at least ten years old. And I remember the first time I actually caught a long third-down pass (American football — sorry, I don't have any hockey stories). I was literally so stunned that I caught the ball that I didn't run for the touchdown! But from five or so yards away, we did get it on the next play. And I got chosen a little higher in the order the next time. I couldn't hit worth a shit in baseball, but I began to excel in the outfield. I even heard one of the "cool" guys explaining to another why he picked me for his team. First guy: "You picked *Hart*?" (Implication: *He sucks!*) Second guy: "Sure. He's a great fielder." Yes, earned praise is much sweeter than everyone-feel-good blatherings could ever be. (1)

Now, as to the overthrow of the sorting-out process by women and mama's boys: there's a clue to this in your recent Aardvark Comment about reason losing touch with wisdom and thus inevitably being overthrown. Your argument assumes that the keepers of the sorting-out process have the best interests of the community in mind — or at least act in those best interests even if they do so unconsciously. There are several ways in which this process has become dysfunctional, making its overthrow by the out-groups (only two of which are women and mama's boys) inevitable.

The reason that "knowing one's place" sounds so oppressive is because it has been used that way so often. The same language which suggests that "real guys" put assholes and mama's boys in their place is also used to keep people in particular racial, ethnic, and religious groups from aspiring beyond their imposed ghettos. (2) Aren't lynch mobs just a mechanism for keeping uppity blacks from thinking they are white? Isn't gang rape a way of reminding a woman what her place is? A case could be made for either of these being simply the "natural consequences" of stepping outside of one's role. But this is not the same as a player who sucks wishing he were treated as an athlete. This isn't: "You aren't good enough at the sport." It is rather: "Don't even think about playing if you know what's good for you." It seems to me that Oscar Wilde was efficiently "sorted out," as were my Jewish cousins in Germany who dared to think that they counted as Germans. (3)

There are two dysfunctional elements here: methods and motives. By methods I mean that getting picked last may be a harsh but natural consequence of sucking at sports, but lynching is not an acceptable means of enforcing separation of the races. (4) It's not sufficient to say that the black man in question should have known his place. The bulk of humanity has rebelled against the notion that lynching is an acceptable tool. If "sorting out" suffers for this, it is the sorters who caused the problem. Using your example of Uncle Cliff's broken (glp) arm: you understand how suffering a broken arm with no one believing him "served him appropriately" to learn not to be a cry-baby. But would you advocate "If you don't stop crying, I'll break your arm!" as equally appropriate? There is a significant difference. (5)

It is not only the methods which are in question, but the motives. You say that "even teams" is the object. But, sometimes, it shifts to "making sure my team's stockholders are guaranteed a payoff." When money replaces sportsmanship as the motive for sorting out, uneven teams no longer defeat the purpose of the game to the sorter, but guarantee it. Again, the sorting-out process malfunctions. It is in this way that the love of money is the root of all evil — because with money involved, "even teams and a good game" are no longer high on anyone's priorities. Hidden agendas of the sorters erode confidence in the entire process. (6)

Without knowing which of those examples you might actually agree with, I have to say that there is certainly a case of "Who watches the Watchmen?" going on here. You see the process as having fallen to an assault by the jealous. I see it as having been overthrown by the oppressed after an excess of arrogance. (7) If "real guys" were doing such a good job of sorting out, they shouldn't have let hotshots and assholes run the process, thereby guaranteeing a backlash. The sorters lost their moral authority among the "sorted out" by abusing the process with suspect motives and overly brutal methods, or, at the very least, by allowing it to be abused so. (8)

Having said all that, I mainly wanted to comment on this: "Super-hero comic books are tailor-made for mama's boys." Ouch! To use your own phrasing: Bullseye, Dave. That one really, really hurt.

You'd have called me an overly brooding mama's boy well into my college years, and I often identified with the panel of Peter Parker muttering, "Someday, I'll show

them all!" in *Amazing Fantasy* #15. I also, even then, realized that that was a panel for a typical super-*villain* origin, rather than that of a hero. But therein lies my observation. Does *Spider-Man* really miss the point? (9) I'm not sure you've made your case. The moral of the origin of Spider-Man as far back as his first appearance is: "With great power comes great responsibility." I'd say that should be the motto for anyone in your "real guy" category. Peter Parker does not become a star athlete or even use his strength to beat up Flash Thompson. He seems to sense exactly your point (either that or Stan Lee does): that if he is to win acceptance among his peers, it must be as himself, not as a super-hero. And you know what? Eventually he does. He loosens up and makes friends with Harry Osborn and Flash Thompson, not to mention Mary Jane Watson and Gwen Stacy. Over the course of the first hundred or so issues of *Amazing Spider-Man*, Peter Parker does mature and take his place as a real guy. And he doesn't use his powers to cheat. No better example can I think of how a guy *should* be.

Iron Man might have been a hotshot, and he sometimes bordered on asshole, but mama's boy? Here was the ultimate "guy who knows who he is." And when he faces adversity — shrapnel in the heart — he uses his own ingenuity to overcome the problem. He becomes a super-hero in the process, but do whining mama's boys really think they can bypass the sorting-out process by stumbling across a functioning suit of armor? Stark had to design and build the armor. And in all other ways, Tony Stark was as "guy" as it gets.

I'm having trouble placing any of my late '60s-early '70s favorites as mama's boys. The closest I can get is the very early Don Blake as Thor. But, even then, the strip soon changed from Thor beating earthbound villains (uneven teams) to Thor as mythological god facing other mythological gods (even teams, sorting out).

Johnny Storm: hotshot, maybe asshole, but mama's boy?

Reed Richards: real guy, head in the clouds, but knows his place.

Ben Grimm: real guy, whines at first but *gets over it.*

Bruce Wayne: real guy, even if Fredric Wertham thinks he's a homosexual.

The definitive super-hero is, of course, Superman. And yet, until the mid-'70s or so, *Superman* the comics were not about Superman, they were about a world in which Superman existed. Until Stan Lee proved them wrong, comics writers seemed to think it impossible for their readers to identify with the heroes. That's where the teenage sidekicks came in. The stories weren't about heroes, they were about someone who had a hero available to get him out of tight spots. Batman AND ROBIN. Green Arrow AND SPEEDY. Aquaman AND AQUALAD. Superman didn't have the similarly costumed, teenage sidekick following him around, but he did have Jimmy Olsen and his signal watch. To me, this was the ultimate reduction of the hero from the subject of the story to pet muscle. Jimmy Olsen, the protagonist, gets into all kinds of trouble, but has the power to "invoke" Superman to get him out of it. That is the extent of Superman's involvement. The 1950s *Adventures of Superman* TV show took this to the extreme, even without the signal watch. The stories were about the wacky adventures of Lois and Jimmy. Superman was only a *deus ex machina* to get them out of trouble at the end.

To a lesser extent, all Superman stories (not just the signal-watch ones) were about us regular folks who had Superman around to enforce the way-things-should-be. I never had the sense that we the readers were supposed to think about *being* Superman, so much as to think of *having* Superman around and on the side of "good." The lesson, and the comfort I took as a young child, was that good *will* triumph. This was a comfort to the defenseless, but also a warning to the arrogant. Don't be bad, or you will be thwarted. Don't even bother, because the result is inevitable. Rather than bypassing the sorting-out process, Superman *was* the sorting-out process incarnate. If people acted as if Superman existed, the world would be a much better place.

I can't claim more knowledge of comics history than you have, Dave, so I expect that I missed your point somewhere. If you're talking about 1990s super-hero comics, I can't claim to have much knowledge of them anymore It took several readings of *Reads* (and the ensuing LOCs) to begin to understand what you were talking about there, so I don't expect I got this one the first time either. I just thought I'd write while the motivation was hot, so to speak.

Keep giving us Hell.

Larry Hart
1834 Cedar Court
Des Plaines, IL 60018

P.S. I absolutely agreed with everything you said in *Comics and The Mass Medium* about television not benefiting comics — except that in my own personal case, the Adam West Batman led to *Batman* comics, which led to 1970s Marvel, which kept me interested through the current independent age. But I still see your point, even though it was wrong in my case, which just goes to show that some stories are false (or "false" or FALSE) even if they are true!

❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄

First of all, thanks for writing. I had pretty much given up on the "Mama's Boy" series of essays out of a pure sense of futility. Why bother? Did I think I was going to get through to some Mama's Boy out there? Reassure mothers? The only ones who would have the least inkling of what I was talking about would be other men. They know who they are and what they are, so there was nothing to be served in addressing them. As for the rest? It's pretty obvious that they believe they know everything there is to know about men, and they certainly exhibit no interest in dissenting viewpoints — particularly from *men. So, your letter gives me a chance to do part three without having the inescapable awareness that I'm just singing in the shower (as it were). I did have quite a bit more to say on the subject, but — given my own belief that it will be at least a hundred years before the opinions*

of men are welcome in society — I'm going to limit myself to the appreciation of my own mother that I intended all along for part four and use your letter as the foundation for part three. Let's call it: "The Annotated Hart."

1. Yes, exactly. You got elevated from your previous place to a slightly higher place through your own efforts. The only one who could do that is someone above you in the pecking order.

2. You misconstrue "place" in the sense that I intended it. You don't get put *in your place; you* are *in your place. In a real sense* you are *your place. I don't think it is possible to keep people from aspiring. If you are an aspirer and a hard worker, you will get somewhere. Maybe not where you want to go, but you will raise up yourself and your place as well.*

3. I think the "victim card" can only be played so far in the game of life. I think the evidence is irrefutable that if people are aspirers and hard workers, they will raise themselves up and their place as well. Historically, I'm sure there are just as many white, heterosexual, gentile men who have been told: "Don't even think about playing if you know what's good for you." Trade unionists, communists, socialists, and reformers of all kinds and in every imaginable society. In my view, the genuine aspirer and hard worker either finds a way around oppression and suppression or accepts the consequences (however grievous) for the sake of those who will come after.

4. Nor, I think, is the separation of races a desirable or a sensible goal or accomplishment. I think you've gotten a little carried away, Larry. You seem to be implying that my idea that each and every person has a place which is theirs to improve *upon,* stay *at, or* fall *from is an endorsement of lynching. It is exactly the adopting of insensible extremes of anecdotal evidence in place of reasoned discourse — the frantic urge to hit the nearest and hottest "button" to refute an opposing idea — that reinforces my view that there is no genuine debate going on in society, merely emotional reflex response in predictable sequence.*

5. There is, indeed, a significant difference. You're just reaching for the nearest hottest button instead of considering what I had to say.

6. I'm always dumfounded by this line of "reasoning." I take it as a given that people who are mindlessly obsessed with accumulating as much money and as many material possessions as is humanly possible — I would include fame here as well — are just, well, pitiable. I would assume that any reasonable person (I don't think wisdom is required) would see them the same way. Rather like a person who weighs six hundred pounds. Clearly, there is something wrong. In the latter case, with food. In the former case, with money and worldly goods. "Even teams and a good game" are high on the list of priorities for those who are wise — or even reasonable. I like having a secure income and a certain level of material comfort. I aspired to have that, and I worked hard to get it. I hope I get to keep it. I assume if I aspire to keep it and work hard to keep it, I will get to keep it. If a Donald Trump or a Ted Turner erodes your personal confidence in capitalism, then I think the choice you have made to let them do so reflects more about yourself than them. Would you let a six-hundred-pound person erode your confidence in groceries and nutrition?

7. I see it both ways. All men have been overthrown for the excesses and arrogance of a few — except the "few" haven't been overthrown. I can't say that I see this as inappropriate. On the contrary, as I said at the beginning, I anticipate that it will be at least a hundred years before men's views are considered by society once more. As a gender, I think that is a suitable repercussion for our failures as men. I do think there are a lot of women and mama's boys and...well, all the rest who want to be Donald Trump or Ted Turner, and talk of equality just attempts to obscure that fact. Would you react differently to a six-hundred-pound person if he were Asian, or gay, or black, or a woman? My reaction would be the same. Clearly, there is something wrong.

8. And what a relief it will be to all of us when everyone who isn't a white, heterosexual man puts everything right — since "they" are incapable of anything but the purest and most altruistic motives and "their" methods are as soft as a mother's breast — whoever "they" are.

9. On the super-hero thing, I apologize for not being clearer in part one of "Mama's Boy." I'm sure the fault is mine — I do write all this stuff at the back of the book as an afterthought to the book itself, and it isn't as polished as a result, I don't think, most of the time.

What boggles the minds of boys who are becoming men about boys who are still ardent about super-heroes is the sheer unbelievability of it. At the age of nine or ten, the former chaps get a charge out of someone juggling five tanks but they apply it to their own lives at a more sensible level. "I ran twenty laps yesterday, I'm going to run thirty — or try to run thirty — today." They seek to improve themselves physically, push their own limits, and achieve their own goals.

I wasn't talking about super-heroes as real or even "real" people. I find it extraordinary that you can write about them that way or think that the first part of these essays dealt with who among the super-heroes was a mama's boy. Many other commentators have pointed out that super-heroes don't have *mothers. Either their mothers have been killed, died of old age, or perished in some natural disaster. No, what I was talking about was how the super-heroes are wish fulfilment* for *mama's boys, objects of fantasy who are better than everyone else, stronger than everyone else, nobler than everyone else, more attractive than everyone else. Whatever notion has been carried forward in our little community that these...monsters...resemble human beings in any way, shape, or form, I believe, can only be attributed to the (let me restrain myself here)* singular *nature of the* singular *psychological profile to which they appeal. I'll restrain myself still further and refrain from speculating on the nature of that psychological profile which appears to demand that the "identification object super-hero" must have dead parents to fulfil its prescribed function.*

It seems to me that what you've written goes some way towards explaining something I find virtually inexplicable — how anyone can see super-heroes as intrinsically noble, i.e., "good will *triumph." Even in what you've written, that's not what you're saying at all. What*

you are saying is that you imagine yourself on the "side" of the strongest one who can enforce the "way-things-ought-to-be." To me, that is just wrong-headed. Why *is Superman good? Because he* is, *would seem to be your answer. The German people thought that way in the 1930s. And your cousins and millions of others were the victims of exactly that kind of wrong-headed sensibility. "We are on the side of the strongest one who can, will, and is enforcing the way-things-ought-to-be." Whether you are talking about Nietzsche's Superman or George Bernard Shaw's Superman or Siegel and Shuster's Superman or Hitler's Superman, the essential concept, to me, is unsound. It is always founded on the idea that superior power implies a higher nobility of purpose, a greater goodness, the misapprehension that an individual man through the achievement of paranormal, extranormal, or supernormal feats is better suited to judge between contending viewpoints. That is, that superior power implies keener ethical insights.*

I mean, if you were talking about God, I'd be right with you, Larry. I've been saying for some time that whether people believe God exists or not, if they all behaved as if He did exist, the world would be a much better place.

Here's a little hypothetical question I like to put to atheists. Just for the sake of argument, let's say that God does exist. Even better, since you are unable to conceive of anything larger than yourself, let's say that you are God. For all practical purposes, relative to your own life (leaving aside self-deception and denial) you are. You see everything that you do, you know everything that you think — all of your secret conceits and grudges and hidden longings and loathings, every moral and ethical boundary you transgress. Now, as God, what do you think of you? Almost invariably they say that they would hate themselves. Now that should tell you something. Why do you conduct your life in such a way that if there were a God, He would hate you? Where do you find value in indulging in behaviour that — if you were God — you would find abhorrent?

I can see value in pursuing that line of reasoning and, believe me, pursue it I do. To my dying day, I hope.

But, in my view, any line of thought that begins with "If Superman or Spider-Man or Iron Man really existed..." has to be centred on power rather than ethics and the repugnant notion that superior power implies superior ethics. It seems to me a repulsively degraded form of Messianic Judaism and Messianic Christianity — the idea that you were not put here to behave better, to improve things where you think you can improve them, to develop a better, and clearer understanding of distinctions between right and wrong, to do the former and not do the latter, but rather you were just put here to wait for the day when someone very big and strong and working marvels and wonders and astonishments would come along and kick everyone else's butt until they all bow down to you and your group — whether that group is Jews or Christians or comic-book fans or science-fiction fans or NASA or NOW or USA or UK or any other letter combination you have adhered to.

I can see no value, none, zip, bubkiss, nada, in pursuing a line of thought that begins with "If Superman or Spider-Man or Iron Man really existed..."

In my view, that notion of "heroism" or, even worse, "Heroism" allows fantasists of any age to walk past a homeless person on the street begging for quarters — albeit with the steely resolve that if that building across the street collapses, they will be the first one over there dragging the wounded to safety, or if someone snatches that old woman's purse, they'll chase the guy for ten blocks and hold him until the police come. It seems to me that focusing on "heroism" or "Heroism" implies that doing what is right and not doing what is wrong is of lesser importance, has less impact, and that it suffers by comparison with "heroism" or "Heroism." My question for the fantasists hinges far more on how much money they have in their pocket as they are passing that homeless person. Let's say five bucks. Four singles and four quarters (for the Canadians, four loonies and four quarters). The fantasist is headed for the bus. Bus fare is $1.00. He or she plans to buy a chocolate bar on the way — another buck. How much does he or she give the homeless person? To me, the distinction between right and wrong would be: Right: something. Righter: a few quarters. Even more right: any amount that leaves enough left for the chocolate bar and bus fare. Righter still: four dollars, leaving enough for bus fare. As right as you can be: all five bucks and walk home. It isn't "heroic," but it is right. It is doing good. If your mind just went: it's not a homeless person, it's just a bum who'll spend it on liquor, *or* a lot of those homeless people are just lazy...*well, to me that internal debate is the individual territory of drawing sharp distinctions between right and wrong. Walking past the homeless without giving anything is an ethical choice. Just giving them a quarter is an ethical choice. Just giving them a dollar is an ethical choice. Just giving them three dollars is an ethical choice.*

Let me put it another way — you're willing to run ten blocks after a purse-snatcher. How much money is in the purse? How badly does the old woman need it? Isn't it within the realm of possibility that the homeless person needs one or two dollars at least as much as the old woman needs the ten dollars in her purse? Why do you see the former case as something to be rationalized away and the latter case as something that needs immediate "heroic" efforts on your part? Couldn't be that you're thinking of the old woman pouring forth gratitude, of bystanders like Jack Kirby background characters running up going: "Did you see that?" "He ran after that guy for ten blocks and TACKLED him — just like in the movies" and much backslapping and Well dones *all the way around, could it? Maybe get your picture in the paper, here comes the 6 o'clock news crew, blah, blah, blah? To me, in that case, you're not really interested in doing good, you're interested in attention and fame and glory. That's the hazard that I see in focusing on "heroism" and "super-heroism," Larry.*

Hey, you did tell me to keep giving you hell.

Next Issue: "Mama's Boy" part four.

continued

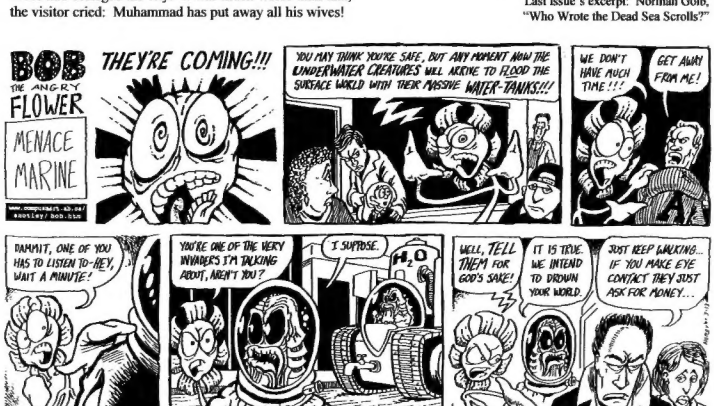
FROM COVER

Egged on by Aisha and Hafsah, the wives sneered jubilantly at Maryam and continued squabbling and feuding with one another. Finally the atmosphere became so unpleasant that Muhammad withdrew from all his wives for a month.

But, as in most of these harem tales, this quarrel seems to reflect a problem in the rest of the *umma*. After the victory of Khaybar, the Muslims enjoyed a new prosperity: Aisha said that before Khaybar she never knew what it was to have eaten her fill of dates. But the new wealth had created problems. Some of the farmers were anxious to put their feet up and enjoy it, others started to intrigue for a greater share of the booty that came from expeditions, and it appears that Muhammad's own family had begun to ask for special gifts that should have gone to the poor. Muhammad was extremely concerned about the morally weakening effects of affluence, particularly in the harem. This issue figures in Umar's version of the story of Muhammad's separation from his wives. All the Muslims were appalled to hear that Muhammad had withdrawn from his harem. Nobody could talk about anything else and a crowd gathered outside the mosque, looking nervously at the little room on the roof were Muhammad was sitting by himself. Umar recalled that somebody rushed round to his house with the news and beat so urgently on the door that he thought that at least the northern tribes had besieged the city. It was much worse than that, the visitor cried: Muhammad has put away all his wives!

This was no mere domestic crisis. Muhammad's marriages were political alliances which had been carefully planned. His relationship with Abu Bakr and Umar could have been damaged if he divorced their daughters. Now everything had been put in jeopardy because of the squabbles of a few women. The agitation may also have been caused by internal conflicts in Medina which had affected Muhammad's wives but which we know nothing about. Umar rushed round to the mosque immediately to see what he could do, but at first Muhammad refused to see him. When Umar was eventually admitted, he remembered looking round the miserable little room, which had nothing in it but three untanned hides. Muhammad was lying gloomily on a mat without even a blanket, and the weave of the rushes had been impressed on his cheek. To his immense relief, Umar learned that Muhammad was not going to divorce the women and gradually wrung a smile out of the Prophet by sharing some tales of his own difficulties with the women since they had all emigrated to Medina, where the men did not seem able to keep their wives in order. When the Prophet had finally relaxed, Umar sat down beside him on the ground and asked why on earth al-Llah could not give his Messenger a few home comforts; after all, the emperors of Byzantium and Persia lived in extreme opulence. But Muhammad rebuked him: they had had their happiness in this world.

Last issue's excerpt: Norman Golb, "Who Wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls?"


BOB
THE ANGRY
FLOWER
MENACE
MARINE
THEY'RE COMING!!!
YOU MAY THINK YOU'RE SAFE, BUT ANY MOMENT NOW THE UNDERWATER CREATURES WILL ARRIVE TO FLOOD THE SURFACE WORLD WITH THEIR MASSIVE WATER-TANKS!!!
WE DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME!!!
GET AWAY FROM ME!
DAMMIT, ONE OF YOU HAS TO LISTEN TO HEY, WAIT A MINUTE!
YOU'RE ONE OF THE VERY INVADERS I'M TALKING ABOUT, AREN'T YOU?
I SUPPOSE.
H_2O
WELL, TELL THEM FOR GOD'S SAKE!
IT IS TRUE. WE INTEND TO DROWN YOUR WORLD.
JUST KEEP WALKING... IF YOU MAKE EYE CONTACT THEY JUST ASK FOR MONEY...

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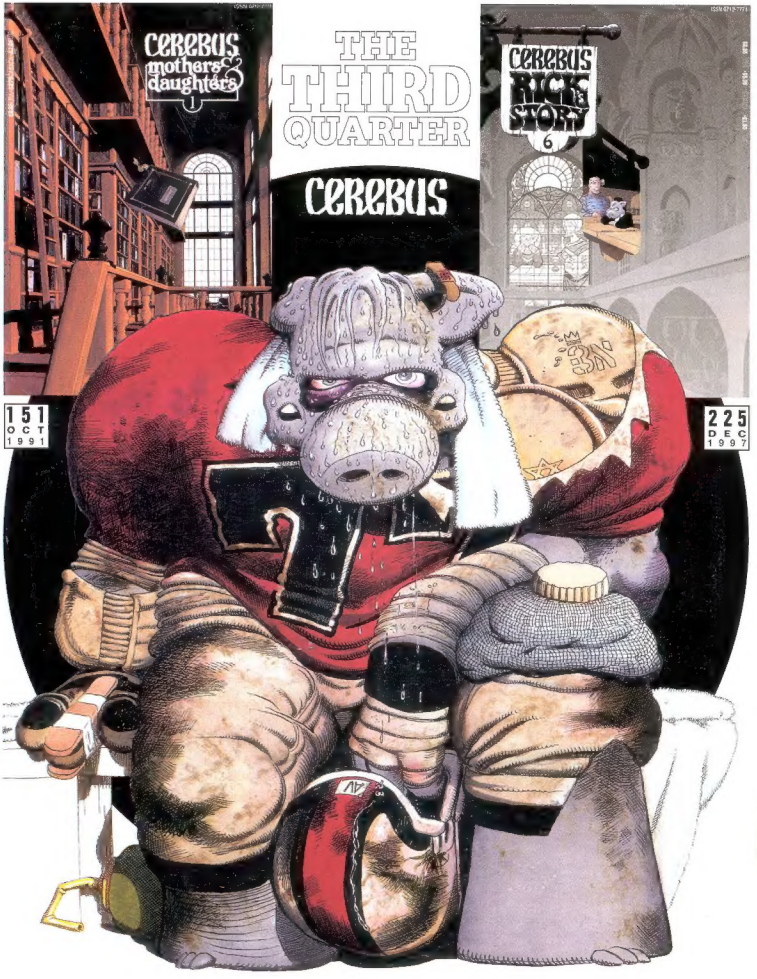

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